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SUBJECT: ELECTION COUNTDOWN: CABINET SHUFFLE RUMORED LIKELY AS CANDIDATES MAKE FINAL CAMPAIGN PUSH

REF: A. (A) KUWAIT 2446 AND PREVIOUS

[B.](#) (B) KUWAIT 2394

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reason 1.4 (d)

[¶1.](#) (C/NF) Summary: With the June 29 parliamentary elections fast approaching, candidates are making one final push to garner support. Several high-profile former members of Parliament are expected to easily win re-election, but beyond these it is unclear who will emerge victorious. Most contacts, however, expect Islamists to achieve slight gains. As is customary, the Amir will appoint a new Prime Minister and Cabinet after the elections. There is early speculation that several Ministers will be replaced, including Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmad Fahd Al-Sabah who is frequently accused of corruption and vote meddling. The ruling family has been criticized during the campaign to an unprecedented degree, in part perhaps due to lingering frustration with the intra-family divisions that emerged over the succession early this year. Former Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi criticized internal ruling family disputes and warned the Al-Sabah of "playing with fire" during a recent campaign rally. In a June 24 Cabinet meeting, the Amir expressed "sorrow" at the campaign atmosphere and the deterioration of "the level of dialogue." End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C/NF) Campaigns for the June 29 parliamentary elections have entered their final stages with candidates making a last minute push to secure votes. Many candidates are using these last several evenings to hold rallies for women, an indication that they are taking female voters seriously. In addition, several local youth organizations have held rallies protesting corruption and vote-buying, demonstrating the active role played by grassroots, pro-reform youth activists in these elections. Several high-profile candidates like former Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi, former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, and former Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mishari Al-Anjari are expected to easily win re-election. (Bio note: Al-Anjari told Poloff June 25 he would not run for re-election as Deputy Speaker. End note.) In other districts, it is anybody's guess who will emerge victorious, though most contacts expect Islamists will achieve slight gains (ref B). Although female candidates like Dr. Rola Dashti, a high-profile former IVP participant, have run impressive campaigns, they are not expected to win. One website (www.q8vote.com) has a running poll of the leading candidates in each district, but the survey methodology and limited sample population likely skew the results.

Potential Cabinet Shaykh Up

[¶3.](#) (C/NF) As is customary, the Cabinet will submit its resignation after the elections. The Amir is required to

appoint a new Prime Minister who will in turn choose a new Cabinet prior to the first sitting of Parliament within two weeks of the elections. The new Cabinet is normally sworn in during the first session of Parliament. Al-Anjari told Poloff that the new Parliament would only meet two to three times before recessing for the summer. Though most Kuwaitis are focused on the elections, some are beginning to speculate about the composition of the new Cabinet. There are early rumors that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor could be replaced. The Arabic daily Al-Rai Al-Aam reported June 26 that the First Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Sharar, who also serves as Minister of State for National Assembly/Cabinet Affairs, could also be dropped, though this is merely speculation. Many pro-reform candidates have pledged to oppose the re-appointment of Sharar and Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, both of whom have been widely accused of corruption.

¶4. (C/NF) The new Cabinet will likely include a new Minister of Interior, a post held by Shaykh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, who also serves as Minister of Defense, since February. Yousef Al-Zalzalah, who resigned as Minister of Commerce to run for re-election, may also be replaced, particularly if he is defeated at the polls. The biggest question is whether or not Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah will be re-appointed as Prime Minister. Many speculated that his appointment in February was a temporary solution to internal family squabbles over the position. Al-Anjari dismissed these speculations, however, telling Poloff that Shaykh Nasser Mohammed would remain as Prime Minister. Post agrees; the PM is a senior family member who is perceived as having earned his position and who has identified political and economic reform as his top priorities. Several MPs who threatened to grill the PM confided in EmbOffs that they had nothing

KUWAIT 00002527 002 OF 002

against the PM, rather their criticisms were directed at a Government weakened by a few influential ministers with suspect records.

Al-Sabah Family in the Fray

¶5. (C/NF) The ruling family's reaction to these elections is extremely difficult to gauge and is certainly not monolithic. The level of criticism aimed directly against top Al-Sabah members, rather than "the Government" more broadly, has been unprecedented. Pro-reform candidates and activists have sharply accused the ruling family of meddling in the elections and fostering an environment conducive to corruption. Even pro-Government candidates have criticized the Government for providing too few services to their constituents. Some of this criticism is mere politicking, but there is also a genuine, and growing, sense of frustration with the perceived failures of the current Government and the corruption of some leading Al-Sabah. Suggesting there is some merit to these accusations, when the Charge asked for a meeting with Shaykh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Sabah, an influential young Shaykh accused by many of working to manipulate electoral results, his office declined, saying, perhaps too honestly, that the Shaykh was "very busy with the elections." A variety of contacts have noted the fact that these popular frustrations are being voiced openly, a possible indicator of further problems down the road unless the ruling family can refurbish its image.

¶6. (C/NF) Even Al-Khorafi, who has himself been accused of corruption, has joined the chorus of criticism. In a recent campaign rally, Al-Khorafi criticized the "conflicts amongst the ruling family" and warned the Al-Sabah against "playing with fire." He continued: "The country can't bear it and whoever plays with fire will burn the green and the dry alike. The sons of the royal family must take their fathers and grandfathers as role models and not stray from the way they were raised. If there are conflicts, they must be resolved between them. There is no call for the use of means

that are far from our ways and traditions and values." "The smart person gets it without it having to be spelled out," he concluded somewhat vaguely. During a June 24 Cabinet meeting, Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah expressed "sorrow and dismay" at the atmosphere of the campaigns and the deterioration in "the level of dialogue," according to a statement read by Sharar after the meeting. The Amir emphasized his commitment to Kuwait's "democratic method," noting that these practices were "distant from our Kuwaiti community and its virtues."

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